

DIALOG REPORT #9

BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT

DIALOG HELD JANUARY 25, 2013

LIONS GATE HOTEL, NEAR SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, AND INYO NATIONAL FOREST, BISHOP, CALIFORNIA

OVERVIEW

On January 25, 2013, the Forest Service held its ninth Sierra Cascades Dialog on the *Bioregional Assessment*. As the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service (Region 5) moves forward with Forest Plan revision, the bioregional assessment is an important step in the planning process. The assessment will synthesize existing information related to social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends providing a foundation for forest plans. In addition, each “early adopter” forest will conduct a forest-level assessment; the Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra are the first National Forests in the region (known as early adopters) to move forward with forest planning. This Dialog concentrated on the assessment that will cut across the different forests, touching on issues that cross forest boundaries. Region 5, in conversation with stakeholders at the Dialog and elsewhere, determined that conducting the bioregional assessment would be valuable to support the overall Forest Plan revision process. Before the Dialog, participants reviewed draft topic papers for the assessment. During, participants provided input on existing conditions and studies and begin identifying trends for the bioregional assessment. This report summarizes the presentation on forest plan revision and trends discussed in the full group. Notes from each small group topical discussion are found in the appendix.

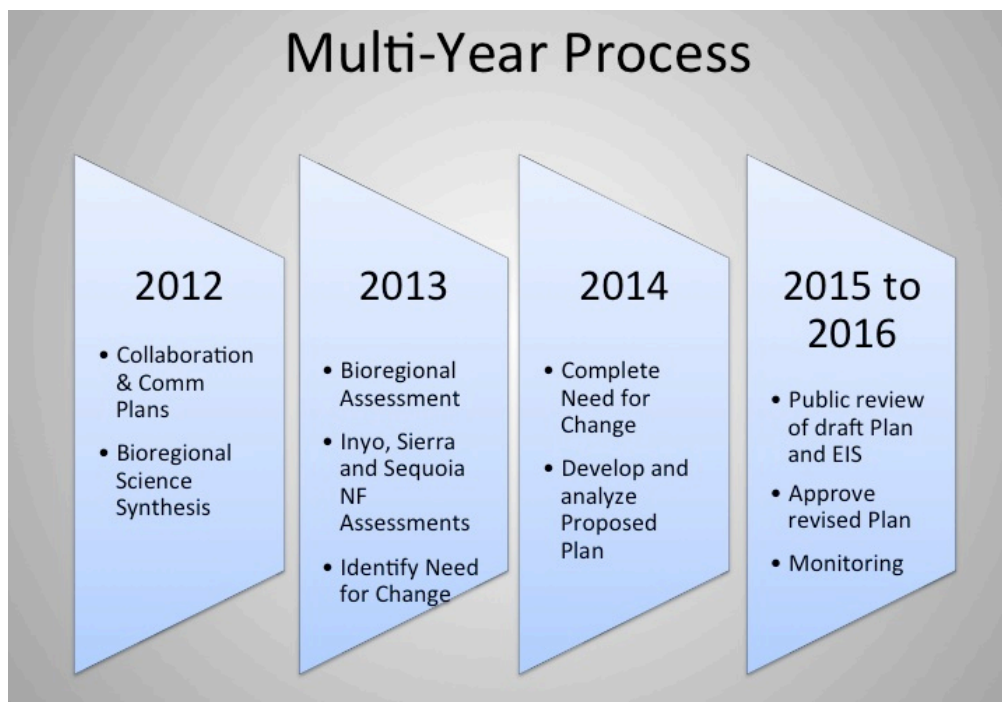
Approximately 117 stakeholders in Sacramento and 25 stakeholders in Bishop, California, participated in the daylong Dialog. Participants included Forest Service staff and stakeholders representative of diverse interest groups, including conservation/environmental, fire safe councils, contractors, county governments, forest products industry, land managers, local elected officials, private landowners, recreation, rural communities, scientists, state government, and water agencies. Although one Tribal member who works for the Forest Service attended, no other Tribal members were present. Youth were also missing from the audience.

The intent of the Dialog is for stakeholders to engage in conversation on land management issues of regional importance for the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades. The goal of the Dialog is to create shared understanding among participants with diverse opinions. Dialog outcomes inform future Forest Service management strategies. The first Dialog helped the Region to refine the Leadership Intent for Ecological Restoration.

The second Dialog on *Values, Attitudes and Beliefs* has informed the Region's biological assessment for forest planning and led to the science synthesis. The third Dialog on *Improving Rural Economies* built on work underway in partnership with County elected officials, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the Biodiversity Council, and other initiatives around the state. The fourth Dialog on *Science Synthesis* identified questions that stakeholders would like the science synthesis to answer. The fifth Dialog vetted a Collaborative Model for each early adopter forests to use during Forest Plan revision. The current Collaborative Guide includes Dialog participants' suggestions, and the Forests are now creating Collaboration & Communication Plans, recommended in the guide, with stakeholders. The sixth Dialog on *Adaptive Management in Forest Planning* increased understanding about planning as a cyclical process. The seventh Dialog on *Recreation: Social and Economic Benefits* will inform future planning by deepening understanding about demographic trends and the implications for Forests. The eighth Dialog on the *Science Synthesis* increased understanding about the Science Synthesis report, including how scientists addressed questions identified through Dialog.

BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

Ron Pugh, Region 5 Planning, provided an overview of Forest Plan revision using the 2012 Planning Rule. Ron explained that the planning process is continuously moving through three phases: assessment, plan revision, and monitoring. He outlined the steps involved in the multi-year process.

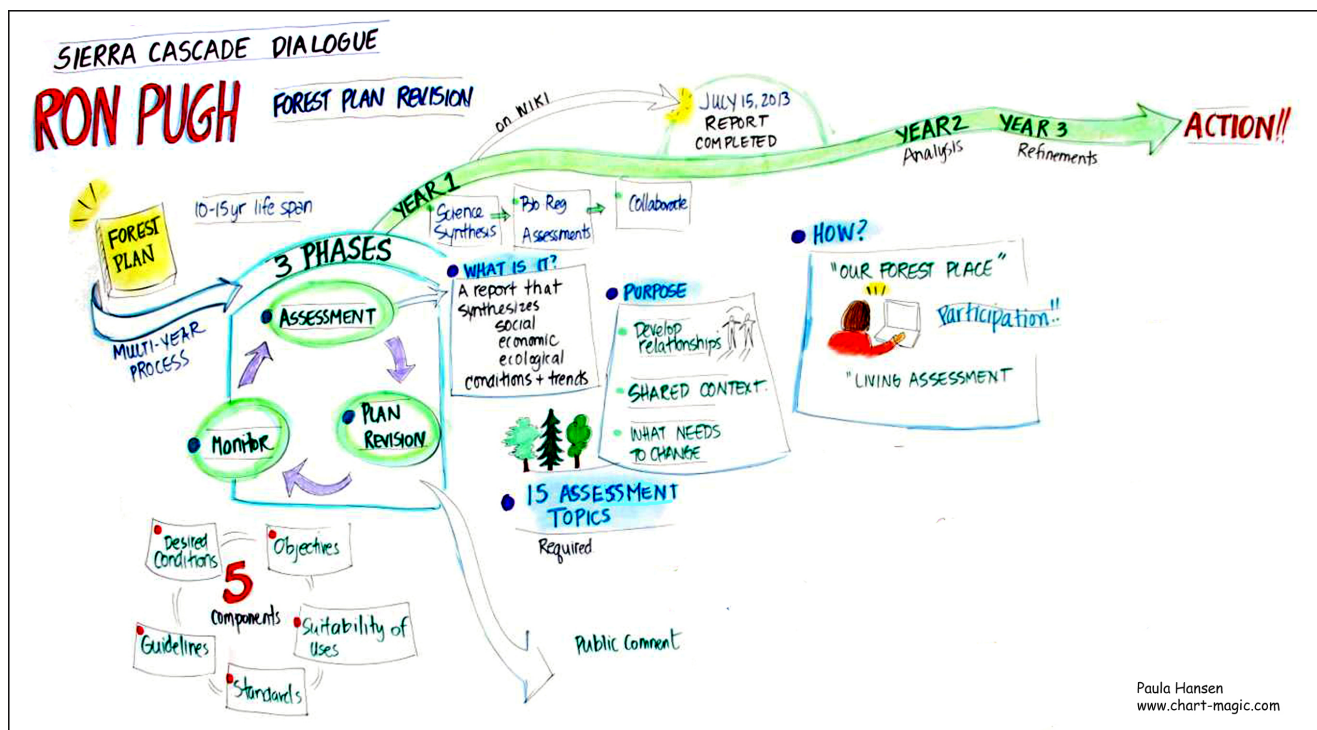


In 2012, each early adopter forest and the regional office have been developing collaboration & communication plans with stakeholder input. The Pacific Southwest Research Station also completed the Science Synthesis. In 2013, each forest will perform an assessment as will the region to lay the informational foundation for plans. In 2014, the forests identify the need for change based on the assessment and develop the proposed plan. In 2015-2016, the public will review the draft plan and environmental impact statement. The forests will approve the forest plan and begin its monitoring program.

WHAT IS A FOREST PLAN

The federal government requires all national forests/grasslands to have a forest plan. The intent of a forest plan is to provide broad integrated management direction for the national forest – much like a strategic plan. Plans are programmatic in nature, do not make site-specific decisions, and have a 10-15 year life span. All the activities on the forests, restoration or commercial activity or recreation, must comply with the forest plan.

Plans have several components: desired conditions, objectives, suitability of uses, standards, and guidelines. Plans also identify management areas, specific places of importance, recommended areas (such as Wild & Scenic Rivers), priority watersheds, and monitoring plans.



ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

An assessment is a report that synthesizes existing information related to social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends. The intent is to gather information and data that are readily available, identifying gaps in information and knowledge. Assessments will occur at the forest level and at the bioregional level. An assessment is meant to establish the context of current conditions and anticipated future conditions. Assessments provide the necessary information to evaluate and determine needed changes in existing forest plans. Assessments cover fifteen different topic areas.

LIVING ASSESSMENT

Each topic paper is shared on the Living Assessment—a Wiki that allows everyone to contribute scientific information following protocols and monitored for appropriateness. The Living Assessment focuses on peer-reviewed and other relevant information, scientific understanding, and monitoring results. The Wiki will continue throughout the course of time. At certain points in time, the regional planning team will gather information from the Wiki to prepare written reports. For example, the Bioregional Assessment Report will be based on information pulled from the Wiki in April 2013. After, the Wiki will continue on, bringing together additional scientific information. This information could be used later in time for a subsequent assessment.

<http://livingassessment.wikispaces.com/>

QUESTIONS FOR RON PUGH

How does the regional focus translate to the forest?

The regional office and the forests are developing a consistent approach. The Forest Service is integrating regional considerations across forests, and final decisions are at the discretion of Forest Supervisor.

What about travel management?

There will be time for travel management to be completed.

How will the 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework be addressed?

The 2004 Framework may need changes. Forest leadership would make that decision and weigh the consequences to regional issues. Some elements of the 2004 Framework could be pulled into the forest plans.

How will plans be adjusted given the three forests?

Adjustments will be based on science. The Forest Service will apply the best science.

How do we deal with the diversity of bio sub-regions?

Chapter 1 has an ecological integrity table to address this issue.

How will you examine 'suitability'?

Suitability is based on several considerations: integrating desired conditions as it relates to vegetation, compatible activities within zones, and guidelines.

How were boundaries determined (if county omitted)?

The Forest Service looked at forests and counties to determine boundaries or an "area of influence."

Can there be a more aggressive schedule for other forests to proceed with planning?

Potentially, but there are resource constraints. The Regional Office continues conversation on this topic with both the Washington Office and with Forest Supervisors. The goal is to keep the plans strategic so staff can develop them quickly.

DIALOG ON TOPIC AREAS

Participants broke into small groups for most of the day to meet with specialists to discuss the topic papers, specifically focusing on the following:

- What else should be addressed?
- What studies or citations might be helpful?
- What is unclear or needs clarification?
- What information should be prioritized?

Not every topic paper had a discussion group. Notes for those that occurred are captured in the *Small Group Discussion Notes*.

WHAT ARE THE BIOREGIONAL TRENDS?

For the final activity of the day, participants identified trends for the region informed by the in-depth discussions that they had held throughout the day.

The **loss of infrastructure** is increasing the cost of activities. The United States has trended toward importing wood products from Canada and other places. Examining **renewable energy** trends and utility rates are integral to understanding the effect on the **biomass** market.

Recreation provides **economic** benefits and contributes to the overall **health** of the population by offering hiking, biking, fishing, and other activities.

Population growth and **demographic** changes is yet another trend that will impact the forests. An aging population needs assistive transportation to access the forest. Youth

rely on social media to access resources and concern exists around bringing young people to the forests.

Adjacent communities are also changing as more people telecommute. Some identify that adjacent communities are becoming less connected to the land and are unaware about the need for land management.

Tribes in California rely on the forests for **traditional foods**. Tribes also rely on the Forest Service to protect **sacred sites**. Providing **access** to tribal areas is a critical trend since designations can change access limiting tribes' ability to reach areas to gather traditional foods or to visit sacred sites.

Fire is an important management component. Efforts to extend the fire season need to be evaluated.

Forests provide high value **water resources** with quality and quantity essential.

Climate is causing species to migrate.

Encroaching development and increased use is increasing pressure on **endangered species**, particularly the land required for habitat.

The Forest Service is able to enhance **collaboration** through systemic planning across areas and increasing data sharing capabilities, like the Living Assessment Wiki. Continuing to broaden the stakeholder base will also be a trend necessary to support planning.

In the face of **declining federal budgets**, staff will have to work with fewer resources,



and the importance of working with partners could grow.

FUTURE DIALOG ON DRAFT BIOREGIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

The next Dialog will focus on the draft Bioregional Assessment Report.

GRAPHICS BY PAULA HANSEN

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Dialog 9 **Small Group Notes**

Dialog 9 Wall Charts & Wall Charts Transcribed